THE TRUTH ABOUT THE PALESTINE WAR

by

GAMAL ABDEL NASSER

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A date in the Holy Land

"I do not wish to say something that may inspire enthusiasm, nor is it my desire to raise the morale of the Army after the Gaza events. I want merely to state facts.."

Gamal Abdel Nasser

A few weeks ago, at a Cairo cinema, I saw an exciting police story of the kind in which Hollywood has excelled and which thanks to a clever plot is crammed with scenes which keep spectators in breathless expectancy. There were two characters in that story, a villain, actuated by evil motives, a malefactor who had sold his soul to the Evil One, and the other was a good man who had faith in kindness and love among people. The bad character committed a murder in cold blood and what is worse he managed to make the good man the target for the charge. Events moved quickly, culminating in the good man being hopelessly and inextricably entangled in the web of the

false charge finally finding himself in the sock. He is driven almost mad. He categorically denied the charge but nobody is prepared to listen to him, not even those nearest and dearest to him. In his attempt to extricate himself from the inexorable entanglement of a cleverly laid trap, he groped hopelessly and finally collapsed. Under the weight of a seemingly irrefutable accusation, he reached the stage of confessing a crime he had never perpetrated.

THE REAL CRIMINAL !

The Army, free from guide, almost believed the farce of its own defeat. Even Egyptians and friendly peoples were misled by the farce.

In the police film, the thruth finally and speedily triumphed, the innocent man left the dock with a raised head while the knave was held to account for the crime. However, in the case of the Palestine tragedy, the dreadful incubus lasted for six long years.

When I recently declared in a speech at the Military Academy that the Egyptian Army had not been defeated in Palestine, I did not wish to say something that might inspire enthusiasm, nor was it my desire to raise the morale ot the Army after the Gaza incident. I wanted merely to state facts as I actually lived them.

I tried to break the web in which our Army had been entangled. I wanted simply to say that the Army had not been defeated in Palestine and that the reverse had been falsely imposed upon it. Every base means was resorted to so that the blame might be laid upon. Another criminal should be made to account for the defeat, but the Army should step out of the dock.

SIX YEARS OF INCUBUS!

In the Palestine tragedy, I was not a spectators as I was when I witnessed the exciting police film at the Cairo cinema.

Together with thousands of officers and men, I was actually on the stage and was among the victims of false accusation.

To-day, I recall how my role in the tragedy began.

In April, 1948, the group of Free Officers, had temporarily decided to mark time because the bloodhounds were everywhere at our heels. There was an attempt in the Army which unfortunately failed. The eyes of the Political Police were turned to the Army. In our opinion, the moment was absolutely inopportune for action. Our meetings were few and far between because we did not wish to attract anybody's attention.

I was engaged in preparing for the final examination of the Staff Academy. This, however, did not distract me from listening to the drums of battles which were taking place in Palestine.

Enthusiasm was at its height and the desire to take part in the fighting was intense, particurarly among young officers. Many of our colleagues, the Free Officers, succeeded in evading the watch of those who supervised our movements to tell me that they intended to volunteer for active service in Palestine.

In those days, I was utterly perplexed. Various conflicting factors engaged my thoughts. Should I, myself, volunteer? Should I divest myself of my uniform and with a small automatic gun take part in the fight or should I wait just for one month to complete to course for which I had prepared for over twelve months?

Some members of the Constituent Committee of the Free Officers met in my house at that time and it was decided

that some of us should volunteer for service in Palestine while others should remain in Cairo.

A DATE IN THE HOLY LAND!

One morning I found myself at the Cairo Station with Abdel Hakim Amer and Zakareya Mohyeddin bidding farewell to our friend and colleague, Kamaleddin Hussein who, accompagnied by other friends and colleagues, was on his way to Palestine.

We congratulated them on the opportunity afforded them and promised to join them soon in the Holy Land to which they were fourtunate in going before us. We assured them that, while in Cairo, we should make every effort to ensure their victory in the battles shead.

My last words to Kamaleddin Hussein on that occasion were : "If ever you should want anything, let my know. We shall follow whatever demands you may make nor shall we let ordinary routine or red tape obstruct your path".

The train left amidst scemes of enthusiasm and emotion.

That evening, I did not go back home but called at the offices of a Cairo daily. I asked the Editor-in-Chief to publish an account of the departure of the train carrying the brave volunteers. I sat down and with the fresh emotion of parting with some dear colleagues and friends, I wrote a description of the scene at the station.

A STORM OF TEARS

In the early days of May, we were still in Cairo while our thoughts were constantly turned to Palestine. We lived in a vortex of thoughts and emotions.

One day we were told that graduation wold be somewhat earlier than the date usually fixed for the termination of the course as forthcoming events in Palestine might demand a premature end to the training. The graduation was

a simple and brief affair. Orders were issued that I be posted to the 6th Battalion, Abdel Hakim Amer to the 9th and Zakareya Mohyeddin to the 1st.

The three battations were stationed in the frontier region. At that time nobody knew what the future held in store!

However, the three of us were anxious to join our units at the earliest opportunity.

We were instructed to leave Cairo on May 16, but, in our enthusiasm and impatience, we could not wait so long. News papers were filled with reports about what was taking place in Palestine. There were at the same time conflicting conjectures as to the official stand the Egyptian government wold take. We could elicit nothing of a clear nature from press reports, but there were indications of a forthcoming war in Palestine for which there was almost universal enthusiasm.

On May 16, I left my house with a valise containiug my field kit, leaving on my breakfast table a morning newspaper. On the front page was published the first official communiqué issued by the War Ministry about the commencemeut of military operations in Palestine.

I had a strange feeling as I hurried downstairs. I was at last on my way to the battlefield. I drove to the house of Abdel Hakim Amer since I had arranged to accompany him and Zakarya Mohyeddin to the station as they were leaving by the seme train. I wanted to divert my thoughts from what I had left behind. I wanted to forget that, as I was leaving my house, a storm of tears was about to burst as soon as I reached the staircase!

ON THE WAY TO THE BATTLEFIELD

The train carrying us to the frontiers was typical of war-time trains transporting troops. Corridors were filled

with field kit, arms and helmets giving the atmosphere a final expressive and impressive touch. Enthusiasm was evident in every gesture, every word and every look! Conversation centred on what was in store for us on the unknown front to which we were racing. At times, the talk was turned to those who had gone before us and to the others whom we had left behind in Cairo.

No sooner did the train move than the corner in which the three of us sat became almost a military operations room. We opened a big map before us and began to discuss the situation. We discovered at first sight gaps through which danger might infiltrate into our lines.

The Army at the time was composed of nine battalions only three of which were in the frontier region, the fourth was actually en route.

As our train sped to the battlefield, we asked ourselves why, since we were going into war, the authorities had not mobilised a larger number of battalions by calling up the reserve for immediate active service. Why, we again wondered, had the official communiqué described the first operations merely as a punitive expedition against Zionist bands?

In any case, in our enthusiasm, we soon pictured the gaps as amply filled!

EL-ARISH IN THE DARK

As soon as we reached El-Arish our fears of gaps assailed us again. The outward aspect of the town in darkness conflicted with what we had imagined of an awe-inspiring rear base of military operations. These contradictions struck us more forcibly as we considered the fundamental function of the base.

Nobody seemed to have any interest in us not even to tell us what we were to do next. We did not know the

exact locations of our units nor did anyone bother to direct us to them. We went to the Base Headquarters which we had imagined would be humming with action. To our disappointment there was nobody in the place which looked like a deserted house in an uninhabitated spot.

When finally we came across the adjutant, he was looking for some dinner for himself! We invited him to partake ot what remained of our food. Our laughter echœd in the deserted building causing strange weird feelings. After dinner, we were directed by mere conjecture, to the locations of our respective battalions.

On May 15, we had three battalions in Palestine, the 1st and the 9th marching on Gaza and the 6th advancing on the Dangour Colony.

The 9th and 1st Battalions were at Gaza but the 6th Battalion to which I had been posted, was still at Rafah. It had marched to take part in an operation against the Dangour Colony and had returned to Rafah.

Then we parted, Abdel Hakim Amer driving a Jeep to Gaza and I going in another to my battalion at Rafah.

CASUALTIES

My battalion had a strange atmosphere when I reached it. It had just returned after an operation against the Dangour Colony. I felt that among the losses the battalion had sustained in the first battle was its faith in the war in which we were engaged.

I heard the strange particulars of what had taken place. Orders were received from Cairo on May 15 that the Battalion should launch an attack on the Dangour Colony. It was given no ample time for reconnoitring with a view to ascertaining the exact objective of the attack nor was any information communicated on the matter. An Arab

guide was entrusted with the task of leading the battalion to the exact location of the Dangour Colony. The guide knew nothing about the Colony's fortifications or means of defence. All that he did was to point out the direction of the Colony, at the same time giving vague information of no precise character. Suddenly the battalion found itself face to face with the Dangour fortifications. At the end of a long and tedious march the men did not relax but stormed the barbed wire. They did not know what they were expected to do but the defenders of the Colony knew exactly what their task was.

The battalion sustained unexpected losses. At noon, the Officer Commanding gave the order to withdraw. In Cairo, a communiqué announced that the Battalion had successfully carried out a moppin up operation.

At that juncture, I observed two outstanding facts. The first was a whisper among officers asserting that the campaign was a political affair. This was supported and substantiated by all that was taking place around them. It was not reasonable to believe this a real war. No troops had been massed, no ample supply of arms or ammunition, no reconnoitring parties, no attempt to secure information. Nevertheless, they were actually in the field of battle! It must therefore be a political campaign, a war and no war! Advance without victory and withdrawal without defeat. Just a political campaign !

The second fact was the exaggerated accounts about the enemy forces. The Egyptian troops were suddenly faced with the strong resistance of the Dangour Colony about which they knew nothing.

I heard a colleague say that towers worked by electricity rose to the surface, fired volleys in all directions and then went out of sight also by electric power ! I was not taking part in the conversation but could not help making

some remarks. I asked the officer how he could assert electric power had been used to move the alleged towers, since he should have been inside the colony to make such a statement, Although he could not reply, the story of the electrically moved towers persisted.

These young officers were not, in my opinion, to blame. The cause was absolute lack of imformation of the enemy forces.

TRUE EXPRESSION

As the Adjuant of the battalion, I was in a position to realise more than others the perplexity and inefficiency of our high command.

Conflicting emotions assailed me and I was at a loss to express my feelings. I must confess that a soldier expressed what I considered to be the truth about the situation.

We received orders to pull down our tents and erect our camp on a site at a distance of three kilometres. I could not imagine the reason for this change of location. What was infinitely worse was the fact that those who had issued the order did not known the reason either.

While busily engaged in setting up our new camp, orders came to the effect that we should proceed to the station and go by train to Gaza. We started to pull down the tents we had just erected. A sergeant ordered a soldier who was setting up a tent to pull it down. The man looked at the sergeant in obvious bewilderment. When the meaning of the command dawned upon him, when he realised that the tent which it had taken him hours to erect was to be pulled down forthwith, he remarked : "How great our frustration is! He said this in a typical drawl and in a cynical tone. I felt that my doubts concerning the efficieucy of our command had already become obvious to the rank and file and that such a crude remark was its appropriate means of expression.

I was quite depressed when I took my seat in the train leaving for Gaza. My only consolation, however, was that I was soon to meet Abdel Hakin Amer. As Adjutant of the 9th Battalion, he was to direct me, as adjutant of the 6th Battalion, to the position in which we should set up our camp.

THIS IS NOT WAR!

I had a long chat with Abdel Hakim Amer as I inspected the positions he was to hand over to me.

At the time the positions of the four battalions were as follows ; The 6th Battalion was moving from Rafah to Gaza. The 9th Battalion was preparing to leave Gaza on the arrival of our battalion. The 1st and 2nd Battalions were marching along the coast in the direction of Magdal!

I expressed my apprenshions to Abdel Hakim Amer as I felt that it was unwise to have our forces thus scattered. We were advancing along the coast, leaving strongly fortified colonies behind us threatening our eastern flank and our lines of communication.

Abdel Hakim Amer left me to accompany his battalion which was to take part in the battle of Deir Seneid. He handed me the sum of L.E.1,000 to spend on the purchase of whatever quantities of cheese and olives I could obtain.

The men in the advanced positions had no emergency rations as they could not obtain hot meals. Nobody took the trouble to supply such emergency rations. All that the Command did was to send the sum of L.E. 1,000 with orders to buy cheese and olives! I bought L.E. 1,000 worth of cheese and olives at Gaza, my heart bleeding for the soldier who, like a rat in a hole, was to sit at meal time eating a bit of cheese. They simply sent the L.E. 1,000 with the order that we should do the best we could! In every beat, my wounded heart told me that was not war!

In my position at Gaza, I followed closely the developments of the battle of Deir Seneid. I followed it minute by minute. I could hear the distant rumbling of guns as our wounded men arrived in batches for treatment at the Gaza Hospital.

The night of May 20, one of the most miserable periods of my whole life, was spent at the Gaza Hospital with the beds occupied by wounded men from the battle of Deir Seneid which was still raging.

The Cairo Radio announed the false report that the Deir Seneid Colony had been occupied after having been stormed by the infantry. This was a painful lie. The Colony had not yet been occupied. The only truth in the communiqué was that the infantry was making a splendid storming attack.

My heart was aching with dismay at the news of what had been taking place before the Colony of Deir Seneid.

What sort of battle was that in which men were being mowed down in such a frightful manner in daylight open attacks without the protection of armoured forces and before strong fortifications with ever-ready machine guns used by trained men? It is true that the waves of our infantry did not stop. Men fell before concentrated fire to be immediately followed by others who did not fear death. But were we leading them into battle or rather mercilessly throwing them into a terrible carnage?

A COMMANDER WITHOUT SOLDIERS

While at Gaza, I saw the whole situation quite clearly.

The Deir Seneid battle had been finally won at a high price despite the difficulties faced by our men.

After the battle, the 1st Battalion was ordered to march to Magdal. The 9th Battalion advanced towards Esdoud.

New orders were issued to the 1st Battalion to proceed east and occupy Arak Swedan, Faluja and Beit Jerin.

I was almost beside myself with fury as I followed these developments which were reported in Cairo papers before our forces marched. Nor could I understand the reasons for such inexplicable acts.

The object of our command was to occupy the largest area with the result that our four battalions were thinned into extremely long lines. Our scattered forces had no other task than to defend themselves and their communications.

There was not any more mobile reserve force with which the Command could direct a blow to the enemy. The Commander of the fighting forces virtually became a general without troops or in other words in charge of posts scattered over a vast front.

I could see clearly that we had lost the advantage of initiative and had, of our own accord, surrendered it to the enemy.

POLITICAL CAMPAIGN!

What I saw while at Gaza was quite obvious to officers and men in the dugouts. It consequently had a particular effect upon the morale of the forces. Every soldier felt the shortage of arms and what was worse, the lack of well-laid plans. There was also a widespread belief that the Commander-in-Chief was powerless with regard to the forces under his command and that he could not act in conformity with the exigencies of field developments. The officers and men felt that, in their distant and isolated positions, they were at the enemy's mercy because they were in stationary positions exposed to the attacks of the mobile enemy forces. In the dugouts, conversation again centred upon the political war.

Nothing was more obnoxious to me than the idea of a political war because I had learned from history lessons that every political war had ended in defeat. The last example which I recalled was Wavell's defeat in the battle of Greece.

WAR MUST BE WAR!

The Commander in the field should act according to the varying battle exigencies. But we were at war which was not war. We had a Commander who had no troops because we had scattered them on an extensive front with the result that they had become garrison troops who at best could defend themselves only.

A new battalion reached the field. It was the 7th Battalion.

I received orders to hand over to it the Gaza sector because our battalion had to advance north and occupy the position of Esdoud. I was the happiest man in the world on the receipt of these orders. At last we were to engage in actual combat with the enemy. I was also to meet Abdel Hakim Amer again because he was the Adjutant of the 9th Battalion fighting in the Esdoud region and I, as adjutant of the 6th Battalion, was again to take over from him the positions which our battalion was to occupy.

However, before moving from Gaza we received strange orders. We were to hurry to the rescue of the Jordanian Army engaged in a battle in Bab el-Wada. It was, in my estimation, an extraordinary thing that out of the four battalions we had in the field, we should send one battalion, a fourth of our force to God knows where! Fortunately, however, these orders were later cancelled.

Now we were ready to move, going where we were at last to enter into action with the enemy.

UNDER AN ORANGE TREE

I met Abdel Hakim Amer at Esdoud. I had left him at our last meeting with that reassuring smile on his face and a free and untrammeled spirit. We spent a never-to-be-forgotten night together. His hed was in a ditch in an orange grove. I put my field bed in the same ditch on the other side of the orange tree. We had not a wink of sleep all night. There was a strange exciting atmosphere about the place.

We were in the advance posts near the enemy and the radio set communicated to Abdel Hakim Amer the minute by minute progress of the battle.

Abdel Hakim Amer told me that an attack would be launched the following day on the Colony of Netsalim. Amer, however, allayed my fears assuring me that we had learned valuable lessons from Deir Seneid. He also told me that enthusiasm was at its height among young officers, so much so that when he suggested the drawing of lots for the company to lead the attack, Captain Mahmoud Kheleif, member of the Free Officers' Organisation, volunteered to have his company lead the assault.

Abdel Hakim Amer left me at dawn to go to battle. I spent an extremely busy day making arrangements for our battalion to occupy its new positions. I was also preoccupied with what was going on to the west on the coast at Netsalim. I eagerly sought news of the progress of the battle.

In the afternoon, news came that the 9th Battalion had succeeded in storming the Netsalim Colony. I was grieved to learn that Captain Kheleif, the Officer Commanding the company which led the attack had fallen in the field of honour. I also learned that Abdel Hakim Amer had joined the leading company in the assault and had been slightly wounded.

It was in this battle that Abdel Hakim Amer was recognized for conspicuous gallantry in the field and devotion above and beyond the call of duty.

We spent the night exchanging fire with the enemy. That night, I pondered what had been going on about me. Our troops had successfully stormed the strongly fortified Nestalim Colony. Our officers and men were not lacking in courage, otherwise the situation in general caused grave concern. In a mental survey of the field of battle, I pictured our troops scattered about an extensive field, their lines being precaiously thinned as they approached the advanced posts and came face to face with the enemy. We had no reserve which we might use in an attack. We did not fight as a concentrated army but since we had entered Palestine we had been scattered over isolated positions with the result that the enemy succeeded in forcing immobility upon our troops while it had the faculty of mobility and the initiative of launching attacks. I wondered why our commander had thus scattered his forces, why he had made a push in a long line vulnerable to enemy attack from every side?

ON A HIGH MOUND!

In the dugouts we began to hear about the truce. At 6 a.m. on a Friday, we received cease-fire orders. Again there was talk about a political war. The enemy, however, did not look upon it as a political war because a few hours before cease-fire, I received the news that enemy forces had cut off our communication between Magdal and Esdoud. By the afternoon, however, we had succeeded in forcing it to withdraw from positions which, had it managed to hold, it would have been in a position to prevent reinforcements and provisions from reaching our forces at Esdoud.

Shortly after the battle, I drove in a jeep to the position the enemy had tried to occupy and saw for the first time the bodies of the dead it had left behind with their ammunition around them. I stood on the top of a high mound and again began to ponder. Here was I on that hillock in Palestine between Magdal and Esdoud with the sea in its dark blue colour extending majestically along the edge of the horizon. The sun was about to set reflecting beautiful colours. I was also near the bodies of enemy soldiers who had been killed while attempting to kill us.

To the east were the positions of our scattered troops who, so far and despite almost insurmountable difficulties, had done their duty. This they had performed in spite of scattered forces, of the political war and of the fire which we faced without ample shelter. To the south was General Headquarters in the field which appeared to be engaged in a political war. To the south east was our capital, Cairo, which made us move according to its caprices in what was certainly war and no war.

There was also far away in New York the Security Council composed of eleven members who decided that the fighting should be suspended and we had to obey.

I filled my lungs with the sea air, made for my car across the scattered bodies of enemy soldiers, asking myself what the next step was and what fate held in store for us !

THE INITIATIVE OF THE BATTLE

Before the truce, we were at war without war. After the truce, we had peace without peace.

There was a general feeling in our lines that hostilities would be resumed. The reason for this belief was the myth of the political war. As matters stood, this feeling spread

along the lines. We were waging a war for which we had not been in any way prepared. Our General Commanding Officer received his instructions from Cairo irrespective of the actual battlefield exigencies.

There was also in New York the Securiiy Council whose mere resolutions imposed immediate silence on our guns.

As a result of all this, there was some measure of apathy in our posts. In my position at Esdoud, as Adjutant of the 6th Battalion, I watched the situation with obvious concern. What increased my anxiety was that when this state of things prevailed on our side of the truce line what was taking place on the other side was just the opposite. There was a high tower at Esdoud from the top of which I often watched what was going on across the line. On the other side, there was no calm, nor was there any truce. There was a ceaseless bustle all day long, while during the night, the enemy did what should be hidden from us. At night, I often left the Battalion Headquarters which was in the station building constructed of concrete cement and went to my position in the tower. There I spent hours on end with my eyes fixed on the other side. The distant lights of the colonies were clearly seen from the top of the tower. I could also distinguish lights of vehicles hurrying to these colonies and coming back from them.

From that high position, the military situation was very clear.

Before the truce, for us there was war and no war, but as far as the enemy was concerned, there was nothing but war. After the truce, for us there was peace and no peace but for the enemy, peace never existed !

NO CHEERS FOR SUPREME COMMANDER !

News regularly trickled through to me from the other side. The situation on the map was quite similar to that which appeared to us from the top of the high tank which supplied Esdoud with potable water. On the first day of the truce, the enemy moved, occupying Abdiss, an Arab village almost on our side of the line. By subsequent movements, the enemy occupied the villages of Deir Dorass, Al Jessir, El-Aslouj and Joliss. Enemy motor convoys even attempted to infiltrate through our lines to transport provisions to besieged Israeli colonies in Southern Negev.

It was therefore obvious that the enemy never took the truce seriously but took advantage of it to ensure the reinforcement of its positions. Using the truce as a pretext, it occupied key strategic positions so that when the truce came to an end, it could resume military operations from positions more appropriate for its aims. The situation was quite obvious to anyone who took the trouble of glancing at a map or who watched across the line.

However, our Command did not seem to have grasped the significance of what was happening before our eyes. What occupied our Commanding Officer's attention was presumably the drafting of a report containing a graphic but fictitious description of how, before the truce, the soldiers had stormed the enemy colonies shouting : «Long live His Majesty the Supreme Commander !» This never took place because our troops during such charges were faced with such heavy enemy fire that it could never have remotely crossed their minds to cheer His Majesty the Supreme Commander !

WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?

The days went on and with their lapse, my troubles increased. At Esdoud, I had no cause for complaint as all that we needed was more than amply available. We lived as if we were in a Cairo camp. Hilarious laughs echoed in our trenches. Jokes were cracked in all our posts. Some of the jokes which at the time provoked mirth should have really made us shed tears.

One day, I met a private from our battalion and, actuated by an indefinitive motive, I put to him a question in order to discover the extent of his grasp of the significance of the role we were playing in Palestine. I said to him :

«Can you tell me what we are doing here?»

As long as I live, I shall never forget his reply when he said :

«We are in manoeuvres, Sir!»

«What do you mean and where are we manoeuvring?» said I in obvious astonishment.

«We are engaged in manoeuvres at Rebeiki, Sir!» he said in what appeared to me to be the manner of a person who knew what he was talking about.

Now, Rebeiki is the region on the Cairo-Suez Desert Road, where the armed forces carried out their annual manoeuvres. We were then manoeuvring at Rebeiki and not fighting in Palestine! This was the opinion of a soldier from our battalion. Who could blame him?

DEEPER THAN CONFIDENCE & FRIENDSHIP

I was tired of remaining at Battalion Headquarters and decided to visit posts to ascertain the situation among officers. I cannot deny that I was trying to enlist new supporters for the secret movement of three Free Officers.

I did not make a direct allusion to this in my conversations with officers nor did I wish to divert their attention from the enemy lying in wait before them. My method, however was based on two factors : First, to act in such a way as to inspire confidence and, secondly, to make my personal relation with them infinitely closer. I was convinced, as experience has subsequently proved, that confidence and friendship would, in the long run, be converted into something more profound.

Now I look around and recognize in the faces of the groups of Free Officers the young subalterns I met for the first time in the dugouts in Palestine at that extraordinary period of our lives!

LOST FAITH!

The truce period was about to end. Attempts were made to train the troops. Reports reached us about reinforcements including armoured contingents being on their way to us. Conferences were held at our Command to consider the situation after the expiration of the truce period.

Or June 28, our battalion received orders to be ready at a date not yet fixed for an attack on an unknown objective.

There was something strange in all this. These things should have been taken seriously but there was something indiscernible which somehow made doubt assail us. There was an ostensible tone of earnestness which, however, was not taken seriously! The feeling still prevailed that the truce would continue and that fighting would not be resumed on the assumption that it was a political war.

At that time, I attended a conference at Brigade Headquarters. I have a vivid recollection of a strange feeling which assailed me as I was sitting at a round table in the course of that meeting.

Confidence lacked in what was being discussed and planned. It seemed to me that we were attending a stage performance in which every one of us was expected to play his role well. We felt that it was nothing but an actor's part which would come to an end when every character would again assume his true personality.

This conflicted with the fighting spirit as I pictured it. To plan a battle and take part in it is not a mere role on a stage which an actor may play well or badly. It is actual life and in many cases even death! But faith was lacking and hence the true fighting spirit was also absent.

THE GRAPES OF BEIT DORASS

On June 20, I again attended a military conference at Brigade Headquarters. I was there in my capacity as Adjuant to the Sixth Battalion, We were supposed to receive orders on the forthcoming plans following the termination of the truce. The plan was that we should start an offensive all along the front. In our sector, the plan was as follows :

The 7th Battalion, which had arrived shortly before the truce, was to seize Beit Dorass.

As for the role of our 6th Battalion, we were to march immediately afterwards to seize the trenches to the east and to the west.

Naturally, I was not supposed to discuss the plan. We were all supposed to be present only to receive orders. Our role was expected to be blind obedience. However, I could not prevent my mind from debating the plan although I had to impose silence on myself; uttering not a single word about what I was cogitating.

What I was thinking about was simple and logical. The planned objectives had no garrisons to defend them before

the truce. Why then did not our Command order their occupation ? Why was the enemy afforded a chance to do so during the truce period ? Why did it give the enemy a full month's respite in which to reinforce positions, and then we resume the attack in the hope that we might seize these greatly fortified positions ?

There was even more than this. These regions were all unoccupied up to a fortnight after the truce. Our patrols used to go to them, returning with the exquisite grapes which we called the grapes of Beit Dorass. Why did not our Command order one of those patrols to occupy deserted Beit Dorass, or, in other words, prevent the enemy from occupying it, thus sparing us the effort of seizing it ? It was strangely clear that all these positions were quite open for our forces and could have been occupied without any fighting.

Our Command, however, deemed it opportune to let such a rare opportunity slip, giving the enemy the decided advantage of occupying them withouth firing a single shot. After-thoughts imposed on our forces the onerous task of reoccupying them whem they had been strongly fortified !

These thoughts assailed me one after the other while attending the Conferences as a mere silent listener. It was obvious that the enemy command had gained the initiative and that our command had not realised the importance of the positions which it had left to the enemy but when it was too late felt that their occupation was imperative !

Nevertheless, I felt that it was useless to cry over spilt milk. What was important at that time was the situation on the spot. It was therefore better to forget all about what had happened or what ought to have happened !

RECONNOITRING ATTEMPTS !

That day, I returned to my battalion with renewed hopes! However adverse our conditions were, we should try to stand on our feet and go through a glorious fight. I was anxious to do all I could for my battalion. I wanted it to become an example, to be emulated by other battalions. I was more aware than others of the psychological difficultties which faced our battalion. It still suffered the effects of its experience before the Dangour Colony.

On July 1, before the termination of the truce, I went with the Commanding Officer of our battalion and other brother officers to reconnoitre our future battlefield. This, however, proved infinitely more difficult than we had imagined. We could not clearly identify the enemy trenches in the east or west due to the fact that the hilly region extending before us concealed them. Nor could we ascend these heights to have a clear view of the enemy positions because Beit Dorass, which was occupied by the enemy, was situated on the hills on one side while on the other side stood the enemy camp of Joliss. I was of the opinion that we should secure as full information as possible on the objective for which we were to fight, otherwise the Dangour disaster would be repeated.

On the following day, I set out with two colleagues, one the Intelligence Officer of our Battalion and the other Lieutenant Ismail Mohyeddin. We were also accompanied by two non-commissioned officers, one was Sergeant Abdel Fattah Sharafeddin, now holding the honorary rank of Warrant Officer in the Armed Forces, who had acquitted himself most creditably in the Palestine Campaign. The other was Sergeant Abdel Hakim, now a chauffeur in Minia. It was my ardent hope to meet him when I visited Minia a few months ago.

PROOF FROM MATURE GRAPES

We spent half a day carefully watching the positions around us. I examined every point in the enemy trenches as well as all possibilities of attacks from them. The Intelligence Officer drew a complete sketch of the Joliss Camp and the fortifications surrounding it.

I found corroboration of my previous estimate of the enemy troops in the trenches. As I expected their number must have been small. Everything around me pointed to this fact. The vineyards heavily laden with mature grapes afforded another proof because had there been considerable forces in the region, they would not have left the sweet matures grapes untouched. However, we did not enjoy the delicious grapes much longer. We spotted an enemy patrol marching towards the position of Nebi Saleh where we had left our car and therefore we had to slip back.

On the following day, we returned to the region of Nebi Saleh. We did not penetrate further as it was necessary for us to repeat the adventures of the previous day. This time, we were accompanied by the Officer Commanding the Battalion and the officers in charge of companies. I wanted every one of them to study on the spot his particular part in the operation for the achievement of two objectives :

First, it would serve to raise the morale of the battalion by being assured of its superiority over the enemy about whose number and positions we were amply informed. Secondly, our battalion would thus gain such a victory over the enemy as would afford it particular distinction among other battalion.

BAD LUCK INTERVENES

On July 6, I thought I could pride myself on the fact that no other battalion than ours was as fully prepared for

action following the termination of the truce. Every officer knew exactly what he had to do. We were ready.

Our plan was that as soon as the 7th Battalion achieved its objective by storming the enemy positions at Beit Dorass we were to launch an attack on the trenches.

Matters did not materialise as we had expected. The 7th Battalion did not succeed in performing the task entrusted to it on the plan. It must be said that the battalion was not to blame, the diaster having been due to sheer bad luck !

The arrangement was that a Sudanese force would launch a night attack on Beit Dorass taking advantage of the element of surprise. The instructions were that if the force succeeded in storming the enemy positions, they were to give a signal of green light so that the Seventh Battalion should immediately march forward to reinforce the stormed positions.

If, however, the attack failed, the force was to give a signal by red light and retire taking up its position at some distance from Beit Dorass which was to be pounded by our heavy field artillery.

The Sudanese succeeded in their attack but the wrong signal was given. When the red rocket rose above the lines, our heavy field artillery opened a relentless fire on Beit Dorass occupied by the Sudanese troop. Naturally, the plan failed.

The Sudanese force had to withdraw in haste, thus affording an opportunity to the enemy to re-occupy its former positions.

WE NEARLY WENT MAD !

In our 6th Battalion, we nearly went mad as a result of what had happened. As far as we were concerned, this

meant that all the efforts we had exerted in making preparations had been wasted and all our hopes had been frustrated.

We could do nothing, however, but wait for other developments and pray for an opportunity enabling us to avail ourselves of the possibility of successfully carrying out our well-prepared plan.

Unexpected developments, however took place.

I must admit, despite the lapse of six years since then, that for the first time while in the field I raised my voice in protest against an order issued by our Command.

It was on July 9 that a sergeant arrived from Brigade Headquarters carrying a sealed envelope addressed to me as Adjutant of the Battalion.

I tore open the envelope as I was having lunch. On reading the few lines of the message, I felt that the food choked me !

The letter contained the following two lines :

1. The 6th Battalion should evacuate its positions which were to be occupied by the 5th Battalion coming from Gaza.

2. The 6th Battalion should seize the village of Joliss on the following day, July 10.

The expression on my face must have betrayed my feelings as my brother officers sitting at the table stopped eating and stared at me. When they were told about the contents of the letter, they shared my sentiments.

We were to enter a battle for which we had not made any preparation. Nor were we provided with information as to the enemy forces and fortifications, the positions of our troops round Joliss, or the military operations carried out by our forces in the area. We were not even afforded an opportunity to study the situation ourselves.

I felt that against my will and without any possibility of action on my part, our battalion was again about to be

placed in the same position as that of Dangour. I, however, strongly protested but without avail.

RACE WITH THE SUN!

Time was short; I had only three hours of daylight during which to carry out any reconnoitring. The Officer Commanding the Battalion, the Company Captains and myself went out to get as near as possible to the enemy lines.

Under cover of an orange tree grove, we reached a point at a distance of about one kilometre from Joliss. We could not remain long in our hiding place, as the enemy must have detected our movements. It started to shell the area by mortar gun fire. On the other hand, the day time hours ran faster than they had ever done during living memory. The sun was setting so fast that we had to retrace our steps.

STAFF ACADEMY TRASH!

On my return to Battalion Headquarters, I started to prepare the plan for attack. The enemy, who detected the movement in the orange tree grove, will in all probability expect our attack from that point. The best plan, therefore, would be for us to send a small force to open fire from the grove while the bulk of our forces, who will carry out the main attack, shoud come from behind, and marching through the maize fields, should storm the enemy positions.

A difference arose between me and the Commanding Officer as to the role of the Artillery and the Air Force in the operation. As Battalion Adjutant, I believed in carefully planned, precisely timed action in conformity with a fixed time-table. The Commanding Officer, however, was of the opinion that the role of the Artillery and Air Force should be determined during the fighting in accordance with battle exigencies on the spot. I was firmly opposed to such

a plan but I had to give in, particularly when the Commanding Officer, in impatient tones, said to me :

«For God's sake, let us have no more of this Staff Academy trash!»

By dawn, the attack had been launched. At the outset, everything went according to my expectations. The first thing to be done contrary to my wishes and expectations, however, took place when the Commanding Officer, as we were watching the infantry charge suddenly remarked, «What are we doing up here? Let us go down and see what our men are doing!»

In my estimation of things, this revealed a laudable spirit but it was not in strict conformity with a Commanding Officer's duties. The Commander's duties consisted in complete control of operations so that he may have the situation fully in hand. Accordingly, he should not attend to details to the detriment of major command issues, particularly at times of emergency. I tried to convince him of my viewpoint but enthusiasm or rather a sense of bravado had had the better of him! We therefore approvaches the spot where the infantry forces were engaged in the battle but we could noth reach it as our car stuck in the sand. The Commanding Officer, the escort and I jumped off and began to push it. I felt I was losing control over my nerves just as we were losing control over the raging battle!

We did not remain at our Command Headquarters whence we could direct artillery and air operations nor could we reach the spot where our infantry troops were fighting. When we finally reached the place our good Commander began to lose control over his nerves. When he found that men were falling all around him, some killed and others wounded, he exclaimed : «The men are being killed!»

I suggested that we should go to the other side to see

how the operation was going on. He went with me, but on seeing four mortar guns waiting for the appropriate moment when they should take part in the battle, he again shouted : «What are these guns doing here ?»

He immediately gave orders for the guns to advance and shell Joliss. There, turning to me, as the Adjuant of his Battalion, he said : «Go with them !» I stared at him in surprice. My task as Adjuant impelled me to remain with him to assist in carrying out the plan I had drawn up. This, in my opinion, was a thousand times more important than a demostration of bravado by four mortar guns. The situation was delicate. I did not wish to contradict my Commanding Officer lest he should ascribe my opposition to the effect of my nerves and not to the dictates of my judgment. I looked at him and despite conflicting emotions I merely said : «Very good, Sir !»

I dashed with the four mortar guns through the maize field until Joliss became within their range.

I SHED TEARS !

The guns began to pound the enemy positions but I did not hear the rumbling. At that time, I was deep in thought about the condition of my battalion which was actually without control. I felt that my whole being was rebelling against myself and that I was rebelling against my own Commanding Officer ! As my mind was somewhat at ease with regard to the position of the mortar guns, I decided to return before a disaster took place. The first officer I met on going out of the maize field told me that Ismail Mohyeddin had been killed.

I believe I have no right today to conceal my human feelings, I confess that at that moment, I gave vent to my profound grief by shedding tears as I had never done during a whole lifetime ! I was grieved at the loss of a

brave comrade-at-arms who fell in the field of battle while at the same time I was also grieved at the adverse progress of the battle.

When I reached Battalion Headquarters, I discovered to my dismay that there was nobody there. Nobody seemed to know anything about the Commanding Officer's whereabouts. I speedily went through the pile of messages lying on the Commander's table.

One message read : «Have achieved objective. Await your orders». Another asked for ammunition while a third demanded ambulance cars to carry the wounded to dressing stations. What amounted almost to a calamity was that the messages had been sent hours before. I conjured up the plight of these contingents when, in the absence of orders or owing to lack of ammunition, necessary equipment or provisions they must have been in a desperate position. I decided to deal with the situation as best I could. I tried to contact our forces taking up their positions to the west of Joliss but no reply to our messages was received. The truth, however, dawned upon me when a despatch rider arrived and reported that the Commanding Officer had ordered the withdrawal of the force operating in the West and wanted me to withdraw the attacking force in the south.

But how could I withdraw this force? The Commanding Officer had ordered the withdrawal of the force which was performing the task of misleading the enemy. I saw quite clearly that a disaster was about to befall us. What particularly grieved me was that the main attacking force was successfully pushing its way through the enemy lines. I then did what I had long hesitated to do. I got in touch with the Brigade Commander to explain the situation. In any case, our objective was no longer so much to seize Joliss as it was to extricate our men from the trap laid for them by the enemy.

"I'LL COME WITH YOU"

I spent the night in a state of overwhelming grief.

I felt that our battalion had lost its morale. Its military spirit was being assailed by such doubts that it was no longer easy to command.

In the morning a message was received from Brigade Headquarters ordering the Commanding Officer to hand over the Battalion to his Second in Command and proceed forthwith to Cairo. I felt sorry for the new Commander. This sentiment, however, did not last long because only an hour later, we received another order to the effect that the 6th Battalion should seize Joliss that very day. I was of the opinion that this was quite impossible.

The new Commanding Officer hesitated. He felt that I was right about the lowered morale of our troops at the time, but he still hesitated to express his objection lest he should be accused of being afraid to embark on the battle. I said to him :

«You really have no alternative and in any case we shall not lose anything. If you were to object, you might be transferred from your command, this being a mere probability. If you were to obey the order, your inevitable failure would also lead to your transfer in disgrace, this being almost a certainty.»

He was finally convinced and said : «Will you come with me to General Headquarters».

I readily consented.

A MERE CHANCE !

As we entered Headquarters an hour later, I passed by the Air Operations Room. I enquired whether they had any information on Joliss. An officer said : «We have a complete set of pictures taken from the air».

At my request, the officer placed the whole set before me. As I was examining the photographs, I discovered an extraordinary fact. The village of Joliss at the foot of the hill was of no importance. What was really important was the camp erected at the top of the hill in a dominating position. It was quite clear that if we were to succeed in storming the village, the forces in the camp at the top of the hill would easily trap our troops. After a short argument supported by pictures discovered by mere accident, the General Headquarters was convinced of the fact that the storming of Joliss would have been a catastrophe we were fortunate to avoid.

I returned to the Battalion Command in a state of exasperation, as it was merely by chance that we had been saved from almost an inevitable disaster! I was also infuriated by the idea that such a set of photographs giving valuable information had not been duly sent to us before the order to launch the attack was issued. I also rebelled at the clean shaven officers who at comfortable desks had an easy time at Headquarters, hardly aware of the hardships suffered by the officers and men in the field nor did they realize the extent of the trouble caused to them when carrying out orders without due consideration of the developments of the fighting.

However, I felt that my rebellion would be of no avail. It was infinitely wiser for me to preserve my sang-froid for the battle for which we were ordered to get ready. The new battle was also of a novel character. It was a battle inspired by a map. An officer at Headquarters glanced at a map and rightly decided that the position was important from the strategic point of view. He laid his finger on it and issued his order to us to seize it. But he sent nothing at all to help or guide us.

I called such Headquarters' orders mere scraps of paper and I think I was not far wrong.

WAY LEADING TO NEGEV

The new position, which we were ordered to occupy in order to cut off communications with the group of colonies dominating the way leading to Negev, was dangerously exposed to fire from the Negba Colony and so was the entire road leading to that position. The officer in charge of the company which was to occupy the position said to me : «This operation is so hazardous that it borders almost on sheer folly !»

I was personally convinced that this was not very much wide of the mark. I was nevertheless sure of the importance rightly attached to the capture of the cross-roads because the plan for the storming of the Negba Colony entirely depended upon the occupation of that point. I said to the officer in charge of the company :

«I shall go with you».

It was 3 o'clock in the morning when I joined the officer and his force.

By daybreak we had occupied the cross-roads where our troops sought cover by means of trenches which they started to dig. They showed conspicuous gallantry by standing in the face of concentrated fire.

A VAGUE INTENTION

The Negba Battle began. The company had occupied stable positions and was no longer in need of me. Therefore I decided to return to the main battle.

At the end of the open road, I met the Brigade Major who was coming to ascertain the progress of the operation. He was surprised to discover that the road leading to that position was so dangerously exposed. He found it imperative to drive in an armoured car if he wished to reach

the position in broad daylight. I went with him to the cross-roads : Presently, we decided to return when an accident, such as those contrived by fate, suddenly took place. We heard the report of shots fired from hidden positions in the field of maize nearby. The Brigade Major said :

«Whoever fires these shots is in the immediate vicinity. Does he think nobody will interfere with him ?»

He suggested that we should penetrate into the field in search of the snipers. We drove through but not a soul was to be found. We deemed it useless to waste more time and the car turned back. At that moment I had a vague premonition that some accident would take place. It was at the time when the armoured car was going out of the field that we were exposed just for a moment to a volley of shots. I suddenly experienced a strange sensation and felt pain in my chest. I felt that something had hit me and my chest had been covered with blood ! I at once realized that I had been hit and that a bullet had penetrated into my chest in the region of my heart. I took out my handkerchief with which I tried to stop the flow of blood while a strange feeling assailed me. I was not afraid nor was I depressed or grieved. I only wondered whether it was the end. This question, however, did not distress me. I also failed to understand why just at that moment and for the first time since my arrival in Palestine I had a vision of my two daughters, Hoda and Mona. I conjured up a picture of my home and remembered my family. What effect would the news have upon them ? I suddenly remembered my men and asked myself how the battle would be fought without me. What will be their reaction to the report ? I experienced extraordinary serenity of heart and bouyancy of spirit. The Brigade Major seated by my side was anxious to do something, anything for me. I merely said to him : «Light a cigarette for me !» With one hand I held the

cigarette and with a handkerchief in the other was trying to stop the blood oozing from my wound. As I inhaled and puffed the smoke, I heaved a deep sigh with my eyes closed. The car was dashing at breakneck speed to the Magdal Hospital.

With my eyes still closed, a lighted cigarette in one hand and a blood-stained handkerchief over the wound in the other, outstanding events passed before my eyes as it by picture reel. My dreams, my aspirations, my childhood, adolescence and youth, my family, my home and my two daughters playing in some of its rooms. I also recalled the group of Free Officers and the dangers to which they were exposed, the field experience with its troubles and horrors, our men, and brother officers and the feats they had accomplished despite serious handicaps.

I reopened my eyes and had a long deep pull at the linghted cigarette held in my hand. The car was still speeding towards the hospital.

I looked with amazement at the surgeon who examined me. His account of how l had been hit was hard to believe. When I lay down for his examination, I was sure about the place where I had been hit and about the piercing wound from which blood flowed profusely. I knew that the wound was piercing and the bullet had settled in the region of the heart.

Removing the stained handkerchief with which I had tried to stop the flow of blood, I looked at the surgeon and said

«Tell me the whole truth, hiding nothing from me».

He examined the wound and then waved his head in a manner the significance of which I could not grasp. I was anxious to learn the result of his examination. «Is it a piercing wound ?» I asked.

The surgeon smiled as he mysteriously waved his head

again and said : «It is not every day we have a case like yours. Do you know what has happened to you?»

«At least I know the most important thing about it. I have been hit with a bullet in the chest».

«This is true but do you know how the bullet struck you?».

Becoming somewhat impatient, I said :

«Just as it strikes any other person».

The surgeon, with a wave of the head denoting denial, said :

«No. You have been hit by a bullet, it is true, but in a manner quite different from what usually happens to other people. The bullet aimed at you struck the armour of the car, the lead ball, being diverted, went astray and it was the less dangerous metal case that hit your chest and caused the wound.

I lay down while he extracted the metal splinters which had penetrated into my body. I held them in the palm of my hand and began to scrutinize them.

And when I asked myself what would have happened if the reverse had been the case, if instead of the metal case the bullet had penetrated deep into the chest, I found that my soul was in communion with God as I murmured : «Thank God !»

MEALS FOR MY BATTALION

Except for myself, the Magdal Hospital was empty. When I reached it in the morning, I was the only inmate in all its wards. The first thing that occurred to me when I realized the real state of my wound was that I had had nothing to eat for a considerable period.

I asked for a hot cup of tea which I began to sip quietly while still thinking of how I had been miracously saved.

After drinking my cup of tea, I felt such a pinch of hunger as I had never felt before. I asked for food but had the shock of my life when I was told that there was no food in the hospital!

In my utter amazement, I said:

«I am very hungry and refuse to believe that there is no food in the hospital.

I was told that my own battalion should send my meals to me.

«My battalion!» I exclaimed and then I began to ask: «Where is my battalion?»

Suddenly this question became uppermost in my thoughts I recalled that I had left it a few hours earlier in an unenviable position. I had left it with its troops dispered in open positions exposed to the enemy. I had left it with orders from Headquartere that it should penetrate through the lines of the enemy in order that it might encircle it!

I shook my head as I conjured up a full picture of my battalion as I left it and as if in a soliloquy, I said in a loud voice: «Yes, this is excactly what has happened. They have asked us to penetrate through the lines of the enemy in order that we might encircle it when it surrounded us on every side!»

How did such a notion ever cross their minds?

I was roused from my meditations by the voice of the person whom I had asked for food. He said:

«Have you arranged with your battalion for your meals to be sent here?»

With a forced smile, I said «I wish my battalion in its present dilemma may find food for itself!»

«I don't understand you», he said.

In order to terminate the conversation, I said:

«In any case this is not a pressing problem, Can I find anyone here who may buy food for me?».

When an orderly bought for me a loaf of bread, five friend bean cakes and a bunch of grapes, I discovered that I had lost my appetite. Food was the last thing I wanted.

THE EFFECT OF THE SHOCK

I lay down on the hospital bed quite exhausted.

The physical and mental fatigue which we had suffered during the past few days had begun to tell upon my body and nerves. Although I felt that I was resting physically, my mind was in a turmoil. My strained thoughts allowed me no opportunity for even a little soothing slumber after such violent exertion. All my thoughts were with our battalion.

As Adjutant, almost all work was concentrated in my hands. How then were things going on without me? Who had come forward to shoulder the responsibility of which I had been relieved? What was the effect on officers and men of the manner in which he carried out his duties?

A sudden thought occured to me : «What are you doing here, leaving them there by themselves?» The same hidden voice continued : «Your wound is not penetrating. Why then remain in hospital just for a splinter of nickel which has cut through the fllesh of your chest?»

I tried to get up. I began to raise my body, but could not complete the attempt. I had to lie down again in a state of utter helplessness, I felt exhausted, probably as a result of the shock of the wound and the loss of blood which had flowed freely from it. All this had affected my nerves.

I therefore made up my mind to rest for some time then get up and join my battalion.

A VOW!

However, I found it impossible to rest. Suddenly there was a bustle in the hospital. A considerable number of wounded almost filled all the hospital wards. This, I knew, was the result of the fierce battle raging round Negba. I rose from my bed and visited all the beds in the wards.

The Magdal Hospital, according to previous plans was intended to be a dressing and first-aid station. Only those slightly wounded were to be admitted and serious cases were to be conveyed to the Gaza General Hospital.

Owing to the considerable number of cases it had to deal with, the Magdal Hospital could not even perform its main function of giving first aid. It, therefore, sent all cases straight to Gaza, after all its wards had been filled - in but a few hours!

The situation around me was appalling. All the men's uniforms were soaked in blood. There were groans of pain from men who tried to stifle them and keep up their spirits.

A comrade-in-arms had been admitted after a bullet had pierced his helmet and wounded his scalp. I observed his pierced helmet and his wound and felt that I had been extremely lucky. There was another, comrade-in-arms who was suffering from nervous shock. He was quite young and I was well acquainted with him, as I had been his instructor at the Military Academy. He was raving in his delirium. I recalled my first meeting with him, when he wass still in civilian clothes. I conjured up his picture throughout the successive stages, when we were making a soldier of him. Here he was going through the experience for which we had prepared him. I had not a wink of sleep all that night.

My thoughts were of those around me; those far away in the thick of the hattle; of war itself. I felt that humanity did not deserve to survive if we did not work for peace.

I said to myself: «What is all this for? We are engaged in bloodshed here in the battlefield».

There would be a brief visit with a friend. A few minutes after the telephone rings. I lift the receiver and hear a familiar voice announcing the friend's death, his body having been mutilated by a bomb explosion. It has no affect on me. A soldier in the field is not supposed to be effected. I should simply say: «All right, call the burial squad !»

I hardly knew why I was suddenly conscious of making a vow: — «I swore that if ever I were to occupy an official position, I should think a thousand times before dragging my men into war. It must be recognized that I wones never drag them into battle unless this was absolutely inevitable. I should do so only when the honour of the Fatherland was threatened and its future at stake; when nothing but the fire of battle would save the situation !»

MY BODY OR MY GHOST

I had a strange feeling on arising the following morning. I felt that someane wao staring at me. My eyes opened to find two other eyes fixed on me in an extraordinary manner. They were those of a colleague at Headquarters and were raised in amazement.

«You are here ?» he said.

«Yes, what's strange in it ?»

He said: «Your name was included by mistake on the list of casualities among those killed in action. When I saw you lying in bed, I though I was looking at your corpse or at your ghost !»

«Here I am», I said, «same and sound».

I asked him whether he could notify our battalion that I was still alive so that they might not report my death to my family.

A few hours later the Officer Commanding our battalion entered the ward. Before he had the opportunity of asking me about what had happened to me, I was asking for reassurance about our battalion. What he told me, however, was anything but reassuring. The Advance Company with which I had proceeded at dawn to the cross-roads between Negba and the other colonies, was in danger. The enemy had not given it a chance to entrench, fortify a position or erect barbed wire fencing. The enemy's fire was concentrated on it. Our soldiers could not raise their heads. Nevertheless, the Company continued to put up a splendid resistance. It exchanged fire with the enemy and when its infantry charged at night, there followed a melee in which bayonets and hand grenades were used. The enemy retired leaving their dead and equipment behind. Our soldiers went back to their positions with the grim determination to defend them to the last.

QUESTION OF COMPETENCE

My concern about the 1st Company of our battalion, which advanced to a position exposed to the enemy's concentrated fire, was greatly increased. I asked the Commanding Officer about the principal Negba battle now ended.

The 9th Battalion charged only with infantry. Its Commanding Officer gave orders to advance and wave after wave of brave men were mowed down! The Officer Commanding the 9th Battalion discovered that it had lost almost half its officers and men. He was obliged to order a retreat and command those patriotic forces to retire to their positions.

Commenting on what had happened, the Officer Commanding said :

«Is it possible than an attack may succeed against a fortified colony without tanks ?»

At that moment, I conjured up a vision of our advancing first Company, the Company with which I went to its present position amidst Colonies so that it might prevent reinforcements reaching Negba.

I wondered what had happened to the Company. It was quite clear that all the enemy forces would concentrate their fire on it after the main battle had ceased. In obvious anxiety, I asked our Officer Commanding whether he had ordered the withdrawal of the Company from its advanced position. In a sad tone, he said, «No».

Attempting to sit up in bed, I said : «What, do you mean to say that you have not withdrawn it? Do you intend to leave it until it is wiped out by the enemy ?»

In a despairing tone he said, «What am I to do ?» I have contacted Brigade Headquarters asking for permission to withdraw the Company, but was told that I actually belonged to the Fourth Brigade».

«But why haven't you contacted the Fourth Brigade ?» I shouted.

In greater desperation, he said, «I have done so but have been told that I belong to the Second Brigade from which I should receive orders ?»

Hurriedly putting on my uniform, I said to the Officer Commanding : «Let us go, these people have lost all reason !»

STATUES OF ROCK !

On reaching our Battalion Headquarters, my first move was to ascertain the exact whereabouts of the 1st Company.

Its position was more serious than I had imagined. The

enemy had encircled it on three sides and a carefully prepared plan was absolutely necessary if it was to be extricated from such grave danger.

In my opinion the help of the artillery should be invoked.

The Officer Commanding went to the Fourth Brigade Headquarters to secure permission that the Company be withdrawn unless there was another plan, quite unknown to us, demanding that it should remain where it was.

Although I was aware that there was no such plan, there was no alternative but to obtain the permission of Brigade Headquarters before commencing any operation, particularly if we intended to obtain from it the utmost help from the Artillery.

Finally, Headquarters issued the order for the Company's withdrawal. It was necessary that the Company should have during its withdrawal an artillery officer to direct fire on the enemy positions, almost surrounding it. It was imperative that the artillery officer should pass through to the positions of the besieged company.

I drove with the artillery officer in an armoured car, because I was familiar with the road leading to it. Shortly afterwards I found myself among the men of the Company whom I had left about 24 hours earlier. Nothing daunted, they were lying down on the sand, like statues of rock, with their guns directed to the enemy.

I discussed with the Officer Commanding the Company the plan of withdrawal. The artillery officer helped our gunners to open fire on enemy posttions. Next came the turn of our heavy artillery which began to thunder, followed by the smoke bomb screen and the withdrawal operation succeeded despite the enemy's effort to obstruct its retreat in order.

UNDER THE TWINKLING STARS

That day our Battallion was in a pitiable position, It is true that our companies had reassembled, none of them being encircled by the enemy. But fatigue had told upon officers and men. None of the officer or men had closed eyes for five consecutive nights.

The order received by us that night from General Headquarters was the wisest one ever issued by it. It ran as follows :

«The Sixth Battalion should be relieved by the Fourtb Battalion».

After what they had gone through, our officers and men were in most urgent need of rest. They were in need of a respite in which they might have several hours deep sleep and rest far from the whistling of bullets and the explosion of shells over their heads.

The place chosen for our rest was an abandoned old British camp near the Netsallum Colony occupied by our forces.

On enterning the ruined buildings of the old camp, I thought I was going into a mansion. At last, we were to have shelter behind a constructed wall. The camp buildings were withouth roofs, doors or windows. Who cared for roofs or for windows? It was quite enough that we should have walls.

I spread my kit on the floor of one of the rooms and lay down in my unroofed shelter observing the stars.

However, my enjoyment of the twinkling stars did not last long !

COMPANY AFTER COMPANY.

Only five minutes later, a soldier handed me a message from Headquarters asking for the immediate dispatch of a company to help in the battle raging at Esdour.

Early in the morning, I was reawakened by a soldier handing me a message asking for another company to reinforce the Ninth Battalion at Iraq Sweidan.

Although I dispatched the two companies in obedience to the orders received, my indignation knew no bounds.

I wanted the Battalion to rest, so that it may have a breathing respite that wouid give it an opportunity to reorganize itself in order that it might be ready when called upon to go into action again.

Instead of this, however, one company after another was being summoned to reserve fighting. My indignation grew when I received orders to dispatch a third company. The circumstances in which I was ordered to send a third company were more than any person's nerves could endure!

Our General Command now started the battle against the Beron Isaac Colony situated before Gaza.

Although the Commander-in-Chief himself, the Director of Operations and the Officer Commanding the Air Force were personally in charge of the new battle, the attack on Beron Isaac was a repetition of previous operations against Deir Seneid and Negba.

Infantry without any shield.

Our infantry position succeeded in stornimg the Colony and starting a house-to-house fight. Such was the strength of the attack that a truce observer asked the Commander-in-Chief to order a cease-fire, as the Colony was about to surrender, but our Commander-in-Chief refused and the battle continued to rage.

Our Commander-in-Chief, had, forgotten two important considerations. First, that he had left the enemy supply open behind the Colony with the result that strong reinforcements arrived in great numbers to strengthen the garrison which was on the verge of surrender. Second that the sun usually sets at the end of the day. And so in the

dark, reinforcements came to the rescue of the Colony while the fighting continued. Our soldiers inside the Colony were almost caught in a trap. They becan to face an enemy inside the fences of the Colony.

I became aware that the enemy had not completely disappointed me ! We were asked to send amother company to help in the battle in which the enemy was trying to cut off communications between Irak Sweidan and Magdal at the point of Kerabir.

I was following events while staying in the ruins of the abandoned British Camp. I could do nothing else but follow the progress of events. I was the Adjutant of a battalion but I had no battalion. Our Companies had all been loaned to other battalions and we, the Battalion Headquarters, remained alone in the deserted camp !

FIVE O'CLOCK

I stood in front of the camp in the afternoon of the day on which the cease-fire order was to be given My head was crowded with varying thoughts. Another truce was being ordered by New-York which we should obey !

Is this a real war or just a game of chess ?

I had no doubt about what was going to happen. History, so to speak, would repeat itself. We shall respect the provisions of the truce which will be flaunted by the enemy. It will consolidate its position ; it will concentrate its forces and give them an opportunity to rest and then will strike at the appropriate moment completely disregarding New-York injunctions !

It was five o'clock therefore, the cease-fire had now actually started. We had peace which nobody knew how, where or when it might come to an end !

Suddenly, on the disiant horizon, I could see two of our

planes coming from a northern direction. They must have been on a reconnaissance flight over enemy territory and were returning precisely at cease-fire time, exactly at five o'clock in obedience to the truce decision.

I continued to observe the two aircraft flying towards our lines at a comparatively low height. I felt a strange sympathy for our comrades-in-arms, fighting in the air. I had observed them that afternoon as they navigated in the air.

Then I saw three planes flying at a great height clearly maneouvering to set on the two Egyptian planes, which, in obedience to the cease-fire order, were coming back to their bases. I began to shout like a madman, as if my shouts could warn our planes obviously ignorant of the danger threatening them.

It seemed to me that our planes at last became aware of the danger which threatened them, because their speed was suddenly increased and they began what I believed to be a moneouvre to dodge the attacking enemy aircraft by making for the sea. There were sudden flashes in the faint afternoon sky and I heard the report of shots. In an instant, one of our planes crashed but the other escaped by flying to the sea.

Our First Aid Men motored to the spot where the plane had crashed. They came back with the sad news that the crew of the plane had been killed. The pilot was a young officer with whom I had been acquainted and who had taken part for the first time in actual air combat. What caused me a considerable shock was that he had not been afforded a chance to defend himself. He was the victim of a dastardly attack. Returning to his base in obedience to the cease-fire order issued by New York he was treacherously set on by those who had been ordered by their Air Command not to attack anything!

What I had witnessed was not a fair fight in conformity

with the accepted rules of warfare, It was a crime of treacherous premeditated murder.

That night, as I lay in my roofless room observing the stars above me, my head contained but one thought:

«We should all have the same fate as that young flying officer, assassinatad in cold blood, so long as those in authority in Cairo, as well as our General Headquarters continued to act in this deplorable manner. We shall not have an opportunity of fighting an equal battle in defence of our lives or of the Fatherland, we shall all be murdered in cold blood!

IN CAIRO ON LEAVE

We spent the period of the second truce as we had spent that of the first one, doing nothing as if the blood freely shed, the efforts exerted, the agonies and the terrible battles through which we had passed, were in vain!

With this new truce we were forced to take up again an attitude of «Wait and see», to an extent quite unknown to us. Whereas the enemy obviously knew exactly where it stood; where to begin and where to end; where to acquire from the beginning and the end strength for itself against us!

In any case, this time there was in our trenches a new feeling of bitterness. During the period between the two truces, we fought with the full energy of our unshielded bodies.

No sooner did we resume fighting, with the whispers in the dug-outs about politics and war, becoming inaudible in the tremendous din of battle, than political factors again intervened and another cease-fire was ordered by the Security Council sitting in New York.

What then have we done? Why have we made all these sacrifices? What will be the next step? Shall we fight

again? Shall we observe another truce or are we all condemned to the fate of the young flying officer who was foully done to death half an hour after the cease-fire order? In such a case, we should be exposed to the danger of being treacherously assassinated without having an opportunity of defending our Fatherland, our honour or our own lives!

None of us could reply to these questions. Stifled bitterness and pent-up anger in our trenches constituted the reply to the above questions. Monotonous existence in the ruins of this roofless and doorless deserted camp became oppressive. This feeling of monotony was shared by my brother officers. We did our utmost to get some relief by philosophically attempting to forget our misery. We sometimes went to the neighbouring towns of Magdal or Gaza. We tried to get into touch with our friends. In our Battalion Headquarters we often spent the night under a clear star-lit sky. We used to call a soldier who sold cold drinks in Cairo before serving with the colours, to amuse or entertain us by his funny stories, which had the effect of making us feel a strange nostalgia for our homeland!

OUR COMPATRIOTS WHO DIDN'T FORGET US

I had an opportunity of returning to Egypt on a short leave. Seeing Cairo again I was grieved. It did not appear to be the capital of a country engaged in a life-or-death struggle. Everything appeared to be the same as when we had left; such peace and calm as would sometimes even induce slumber!

I felt a strange oppression amidst the bustle of Cairo's everyday life as I went by taxi cab to my house. On reaching my destination, there was some consolation. I felt that some of my ordinary fellow countrymen were aware

of what we were doing in Palestine. The taxi driver categorically refused to take his fare. By every means at my command I tried to induce him to take his fare, but the man stuck to his simple and generous argument. He pointed out that, as was obviously the case, I was returning from the field of battle. Would it be right to charge me any fare ? It is true that the taxi cab did not belong to him, but that was quite immaterial. That was, in his opinion, a matter of secondary importance ! After my long and vain argument with the taxi driver, I was about to enter my honse, when some workmen in neighbouring workshops spotted me. We had always been on good terms. It would appear they were glad to see me back. In all probability, some of them believed they would never see me again and may have been sorry for me. So they all hurried to greet me, some shaking hands with me, some clapping their hands and others uttering words of encouragement, simple in their meaning but obviously coming from their hearts !

Thus my four days' leave was very crowded. I met my friends who were in Cairo at the time, including Abdel Hakim Amer. He had come to the capital to undergo an operation in the hand, following a shrapnel wound which had been infected in the field. I also met Hassan Ibrahim. I called at General Headquarter in the hope that I might learn something. Stories about arms and equipment on their way to the front induced me to give credence to what I had heard. My reason and actual experience in the field gave the lie to these reports!

RETURN TO THE BATTLEFIELD.

My leave ended on the first day of Bairam.

In the morning, I went with my daughter, Hoda, to the

Zoo, and returned to pack and again to bid farewell to my family ! The battlefield which I had left four days before remained unchanged, everything being exactly as I had left it. Peace amidst war and war amidst peace ?

What with lost peace and lost war, we lived in the trenches in such bewilderment as was more dangerous to us than the enemy whom we were fighting.

I returned to the ruins of the deserted camp, to the twinkling stars below which I slept in my roofless room, spending hours in meditation while watching the stars, lost in dreams within their distant orbits !

On Thursday morning September 9, we were summoned to a conference at General Headquarters. There we were informed that our battalion would take up new positions along the line between Irak El Manshia and Beit Jerin. I preceded my battalion to the new line. Our companies began to arrive one after the other. Fate had surprises in store for us — one after the other !

IN THE NEW POSITIONS.

I began to explore the adjoining area to get ready for any attack by the enemy !

Irak Manshia was a small village crowded with its own inhabitants and refugees who had flocked into it. The total number being between 1,800 and 2,000. It was situated on the main road which separates north from south Negba, extending from Magdal to Hebron.

Enemy colonies surrounded us. At a distance of only 2 kilometres ahead of us was situated the Colony of Gat south of which were the colonies of Robama and Gamama. To the north were other groups of colonies in a territory occupied and virtually controlled by the enemy !

Around us were a number of Arab villages within a radius of about 30 kilometres, whose protection was entrusted to us.

When our Battalion sent out contingents to several positions with a view to protecting the comparatively vast area placed under our control, I discovered that the same old tragedy was being repeated. Our forces were again destined to be scattered over distant isolated regions and in spite of these unfavourable circumstances had to defend not only themselves but also the villages lying within the area !

LUCK WITH US!

Again our sector resumed its activity.

One morning, I received a message from the Southern Administrative Governor of Beit Jerin saying that the enemy had occupied the ruins of Majhaz and its forces were digging trenches and consolidating their new positions.

He added that, at the head of Arab volunteers, he was engaged in skirmishes with the enemy, obstructing its advance, but they were in urgent need of reinforcements.

I communicated the details to Brigade Headquarters, at the same time dispatching one of our officers to inspect the operation and bring back a true picture of the situation.

At noon, Fourth Brigade Headquarters, ordered our Battalion to drive the enemy out of Majhaz, the officer sent to the spot having returned after accomplishing his task.

I left Irak El Manshia en route to carry out the mission entrusted to us. With me were two companies, consisting of approximately 70 men, and two armoured cars with six trailers. We again found ourselves engaged in a race with time! We succeeded in commencing our attack at 4 p.m.

The plan was that the armoured vehicles would advance to the right of Majhaz where the infantry would storm the positions lying to the north.

Suddenly I began to be assailed by feelings of alarm.

The armoured cars sent a message saying that a wide creek obstructed the advance, to their objective. They, however, succeeded in crossing the creek and by 5.30 I had received a message from them that they were advancing. Half an hour later another message informed me that they had penetrated into Majhaz and were engaged in battle with the enemy. The infantry, assisted by an auxiliary force of volunteers, stormed the enemy positions and by 6.15 the operation had come to a successful end, the battlefield being strewn with the enemy bodies. What has amazed me to this day is that we had absolutely no casualties.

We reported details to Headquarters and received the order to hand over the conquered positions to the Arab volunteers and have our troops withdrawn to our positions at Irak El Manshia.

Our returning troops were in the highest spirits. Our morale was high and our men's enthusiasm was great. The road itself appeared to be beautiful despite the fact that it was very dark. My happiness, however, was destined to last no longer than two days, because a message received the following day informed me that the enemy had again attacked Majhaz and that the volunteers stationed there had to withdraw at dawn under strong enemy fire.

Another order came from Brigade Headquarters calling upon us to get ready. for action to regain possession of the lost positions. I was driven almost to despair. We had launched a strong attack on the enemy as a result of which we occupied the positions. Instead of reinforcing them, we exposed them to recapture by the enemy when we entrusted volunteers with their defence. And now they order us to go back and wrest them from the enemy again. Meanwile, numerous despatches were being exchanged, placing the blame alternately on the South Brigade Headquarters and on the Arab volunteers.

At 1 p.m. the order was cancelled.

In any case I had not ceased giving the volunteers whatever aid was in my power, nor did I fail to induce them to go back and try by every possible means to prevent the enemy from consolidating its positions.

I said to myself :

«This, at all events, will not be in vain. If I do not go to Majhaz myself, another colleague will be ordered to proceed there and it will take our Command some time to take a final decision and order someone to recapture the positions. If I can be of any help to anyone, I should not hesitate.

I soon learned that the First Battalion at Faluja had been ordered to recover Majhaz, Zakareya Mohyeddin having been ordered to lead the assault.

THE TIME I FELT FEAR.

I contacted Zakareya Mohyeddin suggesting that I should accompany him in carrying out the operation. My idea was that I was familiar with the terrain as I had been there a few hours before.

When we had covered half the distance to Mahjaz, we decided to put off the attack to the following day at dawn.

We slept in the open, Zakareya Mohyeddin and I, with one blanket under us and another spread over us. We started an uninterrupted conversation about the enemy, about our Command and even about the Capital !

The attack began in the morning and I suggested to Zakareya Mohyeddin to seek the aid of the motor trucks of the Sixth Battalion which, only two days before, Sergeant Abdul Fattah had led to the midst of the enemy. Zakareya Mohyeddin agreed and I phoned our battalion asking that he be sent. Within the hour, Sergeant Abdul Fattah sent a mes-

sage saying that he had actually penetrated into Majhaz and was in need of infantry support. I immediately drove by lorry to the spot, The battle was raging and the enemy, infuriated at its inability to hold out, was concentrating strong gun fire on our troops.

For once in a lifetime, I actually felt fear at that moment in Majhaz. I hardly knew what happened to me when my thoughts strayed from the battle to my family in Cairo and for the space of three minutes I lost the spirit of the redouptable fighter. Fortunately, this feeling lasted but a few minutes after which I recovered the spirit of indifference to danger which is the true asset of every fighter.

According to my actual experience in the battlefield, the instinct for elf-preservation robs a soldier of the fighting spirit. The road to victory is open only to those who are careless about their own sefety and who forget everything else but the progress of the fight !

A STUNNING LOOK

My part in the battle was so to speak unofficial. I had no alternative but to return. On the way back, I met Zakareya Mohyeddin whom I wished good luck. He was going to Majhaz. I travelled a short distance when I received the information that the enemy had recaptured Majhaz, following a strong counter-attack.

I decided to return slowly so that I might be assured that Zakareya was all right. I had left him proceeding towards El Majhaz and now the enemy had re-entered it.

After a while, I learned that Zakareya had heard of the enemy recapturing El Majhaz and so had returned waiting for new orders. But those orders were three days late, during which time the enemy was able to turn the village into a real stronghold,

The Officer Commanding the Brigade gathered his men. I said to the officer in charge of the tanks, «Would you like me to come with you ? Our Battalion went to Majhaz and captured it twice».

But I received no answer. He looked at me with contempt and pride. He went on his way, not to Majhaz, for our new attack did not succeed because of three days that had been lost. From our position at Iraq El Manshia I was following the news which greatly annoyed me.

OUR PREPARATIONS !

It was Corban Bairam.

On the first day of Bairam we received a message from our H.Q. saying that the enemy would take advantage of Bairam and wage an attack on our positions. It was clear that the High Command had done nothing more than send us that message. All senior officers were engaged in making preparations for the reception of ex-Princesse Fawzia whose forthcoming visit to the front had been announced. We knew that the enemy would attack us. Where were our preparations for the counter attack? Nothing. No more than giving orders to every man «Be on guard, soldier!»

That order was transmitted from the senior officers to the soldiers in the trenches. Our Commander thought that such an order was all that was needed for a counter attack.

ALL IS QUIET !

Events went on quickly. It was the third day of Bairam. The enemy activities began at three p.m. News, coming to us was that the enemy was advancing between Iraq El-Manchia and Baït Gabreen. Scouts said that the enemy was active on the main road and that it had occupied a

position there, where it was digging trenches and erectingt barbed wire. The way between Iraq El Manshia and Baï Gabreen had been cut off. My idea was to prevent the enemy from consolidating its positions. I got in contact with the 4th Battalion and gave them the news. My orders were to start the counter attack and to force the enemy to retreat from the positions it had captured.

At three o'clock in the morning preparations were being made. I had to start at dawn. I stood alone in front of H.Q. impatiently waiting for the first beam of light. Everything was calm round us. Even the Gat Colony which was facing us, appeared deep in sleep. I went into our H. Q. and rang the control tower situated on a hill, asking how the position was there. The anwer was exactly as expected. All was quiet there.

TANKS APPEAR !

Suddenly concentrated fire began over Iraq El Manchia in a terrible way that I had never seen. In one go the village was under continuous explosion. The battle began and I had to face it. I entered H.Q. to direct the battle. At half past five the telephone rang «The enemy is proceeding with tanks». «With what ? Tanks ?» I shouted. Although the officer strongly affirmed the enemy's use of tanks, I thought that he was mistaken as a result of the thick fire. The enemy had never before used tanks. Our commander assured me of this and advised me to leave our anti-tank guns behind. When I started to discuss the matter with him he said, «The enemy never uses tanks. Moreover, the land to which you are going makes tanks useless». I obeyed him at the same time ordering one of my sergeants to take two anti-tank guns in case of necessity.

After a while the telephone rang again and the same officer said that the tanks were proceeding toward our po-

sitions. «They have crossed our barbed wires» he said.

Our commander was utterly mistaken. What I thought to be probable proved to be true. We had to have our anti-tank guns with us to stop the enemy's advance.

All we had to depend on, were two anti-tank guns which we took behind the commander's back

I moved the two guns to face the enemy's tanks.

WITHIN OUR LINES!

At H. Q. news, like thunder storms, shocked me. I knew the situation better than any other person because I had the entire picture before me. The situation of our dissipated forces... And the two anti-tank guns.

We received notice that the enemy tanks were on their way.

They crossed our barbed wire.

They dashed into our front positions

The enemy tanks crossed all our positions towards the village itself.

The situation had changed and I had to face it in a new way. Our forces were spread over a certain district to stop the enemy's attack from outside. The crisis was that the enemy went through and occupied the centre of Iraq El Manshia, inside the district we were depending. Consequently the enemy would do whatever it wanted in the village to destroy our communications.

I asked in great distress, «where are the anti-tank guns?»

«Two bombs fell just on the two guns and they became useless», was the answer. What a terrible surprise!

I raced out of H. Q. It became necessary to face the situation by myself. Plans, maps became utterly useless. I must examine the positions themselves. Borders were

no longer borders. I had to fill the gap made by the enemy.

By the time I left H. Q., the enemy had captured the school of Iraq El Manshia, which was near H. Q. itself.

FIRE EVERYWHERE.

Horror reigned over the village. Bombs exploded everywhere Battle noise echoed on every side, Guns and cannons raored madly.

Such pitiable scenes! One of our signal soldiers was repairing the telephone wires which were cut by the enemy. He was shot, Another soldier replaced him to be shot also.

I thought it best to go to the lorries and the Sudanese company, in the rear and bring them to fill the enemy gap.

Then the enemy bagen changing its positions.

Bombs burst overhead aimed at me.

With tommy gun in hand, I tried to race with the bombs and reach my destination before them.

Suddenly I had an inner feeling. One bomb sounded different from all the others. It sounded just like a bird fluttering when shot. I know such a sound; it is that of a bomb before touching the ground.

I threw myself onto the ground at the bottom of an old destroyed wall. A second or two later I heard the explosion over my head and the dust was like a whirl-pool.

Thus I was saved by a miracle. There was no time to think or to visualise anything.

I ran to the Carriers Platoon and orded the first officer I met there. «Take all the soldiers and go to the school area».

Later I knew that the Sudanese Company had gone to the battle a little hefore my arrival.

Everyone who was able to fight went into battle, cooks as well as drivers. I say «drivers» because I still remember one of them in particular. Ezzat was his name. He had courage and nerves of steel. He never hesitated or feared any responsibility. He always escaped sure death by miracles. I met him a few months ago in the Army Hospital. I recognized him and talked to him. He told me with tears in his eyes that he suffered from tuberculosis of the bones.

I asked his doctor, «Can't you do anything for him?»

The doctor replied, «Perhaps in America». I said that he was more portant than all the Pashas who had every opportunity for foreign travel.

It fills me with deep sorrow to say that Ezzat died before he was sent to America.

Back to the raging battle of Iraq El Manshia; to the enemy who broke our defence lines; the tanks that found nothing to stop their advance; the tanks that destroyed the barbed wire advancing to the heart of the village.

I must go back to the bombs that screamed overhead, followed by the sound of shot pigeons fluttering; to our soldiers desperately engaged in battle; sacrificing the last drop of their blood; to the soldiers of the Signal Corps, who fell while joining the broken telephone wires, to the cooks, to the drivers who hurried with whatever weapons in hand to face the tanks that fully mastered the situation.

It was the first time that tanks appeared in Palestine. The tanks advanced; went through the barbed wire: took half of our positions; the situation was critical.

A first sight the battle appeared doomed. But now, after nearly seven years, I recollect the extraordinary memories and the strange details I must relate.

That day was a memorable one. The enemy tanks made their way to our positions for the first time, after crossing

the defence. As those tanks arrived at the centre of Iraq El Manshia, I left Headquarters with the convictiou that organization was hardly useful. I ordered all men who were still able to carry arms to stop the tanks advance even using their bodies. When I remember the circumstances in that situation which developaed to such an end in just one hour, I can't help saying that God was our leader.

THREE TANKS.

Everything evolved with unimaginable haste, Our Carriers Platoon had advanced through the raging battle. They had put guns ready which could resist tanks at close range. They were waiting for orders ! One of my officers was sent with orders to advence with the aim of blocking the opening through which the enemy had advanced to our defence positions. Our march was towards the advancing enemy. Though this was against normal rules and regulations, as soon as I ordered the sergeant to proceed and resist I saw nothing but bravery and determination to struggle. One of my men went through the inferno with a gun in his hand, and courage in his heart. He awaited the first enemy tank until it was ten metres away. He fired his gun and struck his target at once. In the meantime, an officer of that platoon who was keeping the defence-line, that the enemy had crossed fired his gun at another tank which caught fire and was destroyed. God, who was directing our battle, went on His sacred work and a third tank was destroyed by touching one of the few mines we had around our positions.

In an unbelievably short time three of the six enemy tanks were stopped. The rest of the tanks, seeing that it was madly dangerous to advance, netreated in a state of disorder.

A NEW GUN.

From my posîtion I could not follow all events at the same time. There were moments of chaos and mystery which are the natural necessities of hopeless battles. But I began to feel that every phase of the situation had changed. The enemy guns started to blast our position which action was highly significant. It meant that the enemy withdrew their soldiers from the spot that enabled them to proceed toward our lines. Otherwise the enemy would not have used field guns blasting us and blasting its own soldiers simultaneously.

As I was watching the bombs spread like a horrible umbrella over Iraq El Manshia, one of the soldiers passed me carrying a new gun which attracted my attention. I asked him where he got it. He answered in his simplicity and naivite that he had got it from the Jews. Detailed news reported that we were victorious. At least we resisted an attack which at first appeared so sma shing that our positions were stormed by enemy tanks, Our soldiers were able to recapture the land that we had lost and forced the remaining tanks to retreat.

The best proof of the enemys' desperation was its beating our position at Iraq El Manshia using field guns. Indeed the enemy was desperate.

SEARCHING FOR A MEDAL.

I returned to Headquarters, which, an hour ago, I had left with the belief that defeat was hanging over our heads. In just one hour we had achieved a miraculous victory. I realised that the situation would not remain thus. The enemy would try again. It would reach us with as many guns as its anger allowed it. Then it would start its

attack after bombing our positions and even killing us. I had no time to lose, so I announced all the details of what had happened to Battalion Headquarters and asked for any number of anti-tank guns to be sent to me as soon as possible. I realised that this would be a risk as the way leading to us was exposed and the enemy had control over Kretia. In spite of that great danger a bold young officer brought us, under the enemy fire, four guns and three cars, two of which he had filled with cannon ammunition. I recommended that he be decorated and cited for his bravery. After the siege, I found that a medal had finally been awarded to him,

WHERE WE FOUND THEM.

Our lines were reorganised according to the new situation. I placed three anti-tank guns at the spot where the enemy attacked us. I expected it to return through if it were ever to come back. I imagined the enemy believed that we had taken precautions in every place except that from which he did fruitlessly attack us. At 10 o'clock in the morning the enemy began the second attack preceded by 6 tanks which advanced with confidence in the belief that we were without anti-tank guns. The enemy must have thought that if we had had any we would have used them in the first attack. Our anti-tank guns remained silent. Only the mortars were used. The time came when our anti-tank guns proved their presence. No sooner did the tanks come near the wires around our positions than the 3 guns were fired simultaneously. Two of the tanks were damaged, and the rest of the enemy tanks retreated in disorder, In the afternoon the enemy tanks tried once more to advance. The strong fire that they met forced them to retreat without fighting. Thus, by 5 o'clock, our soldiers

had acquired such high morale and self-confidence, as they had never had before. I inspected our forces.

The greatest annoyance was that a good number of our colleagues in the corps, soldiers as well as officers, had fallen in the battle field after recording unforgettable stories of bravery and self-sacrifice. At night our patrols found some corpses of the cooks and drivers who fought in the hopeless battle. The bodies were beyond the barbed wires, which defended our lines. This meant that those brave soldiers were not satisfied with sending the enemy back but they ran after them in no man's-land between our lines and those of the enemy.

WHAT HAPPENED ?

That night I sat at Headquarters trying to visualize the situation as a whole. It was doubtless that the enemy attack at Iraq el Manshia was no more than a part of a general plan. The enemy failed to storm our positions. What was going to happen to its general plan? Was it going to realise it at another place? Had I had foresight at that time, I would have known that what I thought was not far from reality... The enemy had, as the development proved later on a general plan, which depended for its first stage on making a way through our positions. As the enemy failed in its attempt, it had to find another way. It attacked the crossroads at Iraq El Swaydan. And again, if I had had powerful field glasses, I would have seen Col. Pigal Allou, who was leading the enemy, in the Negev battles talking to his men to encourage them. I would have seen him leading his men to the crossroads battle, where, to our misfortune, that leader met no resistance but obtained victory instead !

I received news of the loss of the position at the cross-

roads at Iraq el Swaydan with great astonishment. I knew what that position meant to us. Its loss separated our forces in the land between Iraq el Swaydan and Hebron, on the one hand and the principal group of the army operating on the coast line between Gaza and Asdood. I knew that our forces there were considerable. Now, I am not disclosing a secret by saying that 12 Vickers guns were defending that position. In spite of such great power I believe that after following the details of action we could not help losing that position. It was even unbelievable that it could have been otherwise. That position was under the charge of the 9th Bn., but its commanding officer was on leave. His successor was killed by a mortar shell. Its third commanding officer took a car and rode on never stopping before he was in Ismailia. As for the fourth he left battalion and went to the H.Q. at el Magdal. Unfortunately, Abdel Hakim Amer, was transferred from this battalion to the 2nd Bn. Here I say, and I am sure that it is not only because of friendship, that had Abdel Hakim Amer remained there, the battle would have taken another turn and the enemy would not have taken the position so easily by a treacherous surprise.

A SURGICAL OPERATION

The road between us and Magdal was blocked after the enemy had taken hold of the crossroads. The second attack started by proceeding from Kharbet el Amir to the main road which they occupied north as well as south. This kept us away from Baït Gibreen. Thus, we became surrounded comptetely on the east and the west. I began to realise that we were in a critical position. The situation was more than serious and the enemy was very active. Its air raids began to hit our positions more and more. Our

aircraft disappeared completely and we never saw them again. The enemy artillery never stopped a moment, never gave us peace. What annoyed me more was that we had among us a larger number of wounded soldiers. All I hoped was to find a way to bring our wounded men to a place where they could be treated. Their presence among us greatly disheartened us. Moreover there were also some sick people. In the morning I found a friend suffering pain, the diagnosis of which was that he had appendicitis. An operation had to be performed on him at once but how? I went out furiously searching for our carriers platoons to find another track leading to Baït Gibreen. I was indescribably pleased when the platoon came black saying that they had found a by-way still open to Baït Gibreen. With relief I put the wounded and the sick under the charge of an officer to take them in a caravan through the back road to Baït Gibreen.

WHERE WAS IT?

I was about to take the wireless in my hands and smash it on the gound, to get rid of this comedy which it transmitted to us. News came announcing that the Security Council had ordered another case-fire.

At last the Security Council spoke. Where was it? Where were its speakers?.. The enemy started its movement on October 15. But the Security Council closed its eyes, its ears, held its tongue. The 17th, 18th, 19th and the 20th passed. During this period the enemy was able to cut through our lines, and then, only then, the Council opened its eyes, ears and gave ordens to stop fire.

It was a well arranged plan; a conspiracy against us. It was no less than playing with our fate, future and life.

It was mere fun in which we were not allowed to take part, just because of fire over us and the blocked roads around us.

THE FALUJA CONFERENCE.

On Thursday October 21 in the morning, we were invited to the Faluja Conference which consisted of the commanding officer of the surrounded battalions and their seconds in command. These were three, the first battalion, the second battalion and the sixth battalion which was ours.

The Faluja Conference was headed by El Sayed Taha of the 1st Bn., who told us that he had received from General H. Q. an order ordering us to be ready for retreat, and that we should start the retreat at half past six after receiving an order confirming it.

This, in my opinion, was the best thing to do. We were three battalions, nearly 1/3 of the expeditionary force. Was it wise, that 1/3 of the expeditionary force should give in following a siege from the east and the west? On the other hand I found out that our stay there was useless; we were there to separate the south of Negev from the north. Now, the north and the south of Negev were joined. So, why should we have remained?

From a third point of view, I thought that the retreat of our three battalions to Hebron would force the enemy to spread its forces between it and the group of the main forces by the coast. It seemed that all the members of the Conference accepted my point of view except its chief El Sayed Taha. Nevertheless, he had to approve it. He asked me to prepare a detailed plan for the re reat through the side road which the enemy had not noticed and by which we had sent our wounded men to Baït Gibreen. No sooner had I started the retreat plan than El Sayad Taha received a second order from H.Q. saying «The first order of retreat

is cancelled. Keep your positions. The case-fire order is to our advantage.

We were surrounded by mystery. The case-fire order, according to the Security Council, had to start at 2 p.m. Friday, 22nd of October. At the fixed time we stppped fire, but the enemy did not. Its forces kept on occupying positions which would complete the siege. I hoped that the enemy might concentrate its efforts on the paved main road and that it might forget the side road leading to Baït Gibreen, I hoped that it might still be open for us. But if hopes were horses, beggars would ride! The enemy had occupied that side road early on Saturday morning of 23rd of October. It reinforced its positions. This meant that the chain of the blockade was complete and that there was no way out.

At 1 p.m. El Sayed Taha received a new order from General H. Q. to retreat to Hebron. Unfortunately, the best chance was lost. Hesitation made impossible today what was possible yesterday, what had been possible only a few hours before. Now we had to force our way through the enemy blockade. I had given an order at noon that the daily rations should be reduced to one fourth. We had to adapt ourselves to new conditions.

ENEMY LEAFLETS.

We spent a horrible night as preys to a war of nerves. The enemy planes flew over our position throwing leaflets. I read one. It was directed to us and read as follows: «Officers, N.C.O.S. of the 2nd and 4th Bn..» I went on reading it to the end, my blood boiling in my veins. «Officers, Sergeants of the 2nd and 4th Bn.

«Do you know that you are surrounded? The 2nd Bn. is surrounded and so is the 4th. There is no way to get

in contact with each other. You can't stop the blockade. You know, that is meant by being encircled? It means death which you will suffer very soon! Your commanders will never fulfil their promises. They say to you, that you will soon get help, men, ammunition, fuel, and provisions. You will never get amything.

«The Israeli forces have occupied Beersheba after destroying your forces completely. If ever you think of help being sent to you by King Abdullah, you must bear in mind that he wishes one thing only and that is dislocating your forces from your positions at Bethlehem and Hebron. Now you see in this land the result of the false propaganda which you believed before you were sent from Egypt. Your leaders and statesmen misled you by saying that Palestine was easy to conquer and by promising you much booty. Have you enjoyed here anything? What have you got except catastrophes and great loss? You will never get anything but that in future. You yourselves have seen how the Jews defend their country, their land and how they fight. They did not occupy any foreign country. They have never thought of it nor will they ever do so.

«If you just looked at the map you would see that the Israelis surround you as a bracelet does a wrist. You have to choose; if you prefer life you have to yield and surrender, you will return safe to your country and bear in mind that we never kill our captives. This is a lying propaganda which your leaders have invented, your leaders who expect medals and rewards and never think of hundreds and thousands of their soldiers dying. They get medals and you death?»

«Lewa Ahmed Bey Mohamed Ali El Mawawy had ordered besieged soldiers to fight till death at Baït Afa and at Iraq El Swaydan. But where is His Excellency now? He took to his heels after so many officers had been

captured. And where is the Officer Cummanding Beersheba? He left his men defeated and escaped! His escape was at the cross-roads, and the army recorded that the commander was the first to escape. Such cases of flight took place at El Halikat and at other positions taken by our forces. Think a little before your death. Listen to your captive brothers inviting you to surrender. Save yourselves by yourselves and surrender.

«Everyone that comes with this leaflet in hand will get security and we promise him a safe return to his house. You must be assured, Officers, that we respect your rights. and those of your delegate who comes holding the white flag for negotiations. Be assured, officers, that we respect your military rights. Keep in mind that this is an ultimatum.»

A WHITE FLAG.

In the morning another stage of cold war began. A sergeant came saying that an enemy armed car, raising a white flag was waiting outside our lines. A loud voice from a loud-speaker saying. «An Israeli officer wants to meet an Egyptian officer». I took a jeep and went to the white-flagged enemy car. The loud-speaker was still screaming «An Israeli officer wants to meet an Egyptian officer».

I decided to go. I jumped into the jeep, just as I was. I was wearing a short pair of khaki trousers and a pull-over of the same colour. I had with me two officers and a sergeant with a tommy gun in hand. The jeep went at full speed towards the armed white-flagged enemy car in which the screaming loud-speaker was asking for an Egyptian officer to meet the Israeli one.

PRIDE AND CONCEIT

It was a thilling experience. Different emotions took hold of me. Here is an enemy armed car waiting for one of us. Here I am going at full speed to talk to one of the officers I was trying my best to kill. He too was doing his utmost to kill me. Our situation was as far as I knew, critical, being encircled by the enemy. Fire never stopped. Aeroplanes, tanks and leaflets... Yet on the road it was utterly calm. Nothing disturbed the tranquillity except the jeep motor. I stopped the car in front of that of the enemy. The enemy officers looked out of the armed car. Their eyes expressed great astonisment. One of them suddenly pulled himself together and spoke in English, very conceitedly. «I am the personal assistant of the Officer Commanding this area. I am ordered to put the situation before you. You are completely encircled.»

I answered in perfect calm. A feeling of serenity reigned over me. «As for the situation, we fully realize its gravity. But we will never surrender.» And I added without any vibration in my tone, «we are here to defend the honour of our army.»

He began to speak in Hebrew and one of his colleagues translated. He then shifted to English and at last he put his pride aside and spoke in Arabic describing the situation to us. He added, «Won't you go back to your general and speak to him?» I answered. «You are asking for the impossible we will never surrender. There is no need to ask him».

He gazed at me.... and we exchanged looks. Finally he dropped his Mask of conceit, and spoke very politely and at a low voice, «may I ask you for something very humaniterian?»

«What is it?» I said.

«We want to carry our dead of the last battle from the territory under your control. You know that their relations would like to give them funerals. I looked at him, moved by his quiet voice which filled me with deep satisfaction.

«We grant you permission» I said. As we returned, our jeep was echoing with laughter and merriment. We were actually drawing a comparison between the beginning and the end of the meeting, between the pride and conceit and the way they asked for their dead soldiers'.

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